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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001883

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/EX

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#) [OSCE](#)

SUBJECT: SOUTHEAST TURKEY: IRF ISSUES IN MALATYA

REF: A. ANKARA 0814

[1](#)B. ANKARA 1342

[1](#)C. ANKARA 1511

CLASSIFIED BY POL COUNSELOR JOHN W. KUNSTADTER FOR REASONS  
1.4 (B) & (D). THIS CABLE IS FROM AMCONSUL ADANA.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Poloff met with a member of the Protestant community in Malatya on March 22 to discuss religious freedom issues. According to British national Angus Reid (please strictly protect), a small group of worshipers are meeting in private homes and are not being prevented by authorities from doing so. In the past 18 months, however, a number of negative articles have appeared in the Malatya press casting doubt upon the motives of the Protestants in town. Our interlocutor mentioned both Saadet Party and at least one Security Directorate official as sources for some of the articles. Separately, one Protestant community member's request to participate with Christian books in a religious book fair in Malatya was denied by organizers (Note: It is unclear if those who rejected the petition were government officials. End note.) Reid was extremely careful in his characterization of the environment in Malatya and seemed to be exercising self-censorship. A representative of Malatya's Alevi community described a more positive environment for his community, but was still critical of the state's mandatory religious education requirements and its record in approving the opening new Cem Evis, or Alevi houses of worship. End Summary.

(C) Focus on believers, not administrative matters  
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[1](#)2. (C) Per Reftel B, Consulate Adana had heard from various sources in town that Protestants were facing an intimidating environment in Malatya. On March 22, poloff traveled to Malatya and met with one member of the small Protestant community there to learn about the situation first-hand. British national Angus Reid (please strictly protect) told poloff that he moved to Malatya less than two years ago from inside Turkey; he had lived previously in Izmir and Adana. Four families (his included) appear to make up the core of the Protestant community and a small group of less than 20 people regularly worship with them. To date they have been using homes for their worship, Reid said, usually in two separate groups. The community does not have the resources to acquire property, he added, so they have not yet looked into the possibility of obtaining a building. He did not indicate that the police officials were hindering worship services in private homes. He also stressed that until a critical mass of believers from Malatya itself were interested in finding a church building, he did not think that the "administrative" issues were pressing - they, the worshipers, rather than a concrete structure, form the "church."

[1](#)3. (C) Reid stated that he himself had not had much contact with local authorities, outside of the Foreigners Branch of the police, which had shown understanding in his discussions with them about work permit matters. He had had a work permit from his time in other cities in Turkey, but apparently had to re-apply given his relocation and new enterprise in Malatya. Along with a German partner, Reid runs a translation service That serves several businesses in Malatya's organized industrial area. (Note: On two occasions he insisted to us that the business "is for real," leading us to believe that he has been accused of using the business as a cover for his religious activity. End note.) He indicated that he had good personal relationships around town, including with his neighbors who were very devout Muslims. In terms of contacts with authorities, however, he added that he had heard one of his Protestant colleagues had attempted to participate in a religious (in this case, only Sunni, they later learned) book fair, providing Christian literature, but was told by organizers it was not possible. Reid's impression is that the fair was organized by municipal or Diyanet officials. His colleague attempted to participate in Fall 2003 and again in Fall 2004, both times unsuccessfully.

(C) Negative Press, with help from SP

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14. (C) Reid kept a positive and careful tone in communicating his personal experience to us, painstakingly choosing his words. (Note: He stated that one of his colleagues, also an expatriate, who was out of town, "would probably have more to say." End note.) In his most candid exchange, he shared that a number of negative articles had appeared in the media during the past year and a half about the Protestant community in Malatya and its motives. That time period coincides with Reid's arrival in Malatya. "I don't want to get into the details," he said, but when asked what the sources of those articles might have been, he indicated that a Saadet Partisi (SP) official had made a very "unhelpful" speech that had been cited, and that a Security Directorate official was quoted in one of the stories, as well, stating something that was "not true." Reid said he had gone to visit the SP office in Malatya not long after one of the articles, and had what seemed to be a friendly discussion with someone there, but that attitudes had not changed. When discussing actions police have taken in the name of protecting Protestant worshipers in some other towns, Reid claimed that he understood the police feeling threatened and their need to provide security. "We would welcome plainclothes police in our worship, but not the uniforms and cameras," he said. Perhaps naively, he indicated he would talk to the police directly to explain his preferences if and when it came to the point of the community securing a building and facing a possible police presence at their worship.

Cem Vakfi: Change Mandatory Religious Instruction  
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15. (C) Separately, Esref Dogan, President of the Cem Foundation's Malatya Chapter, told poloff that if Articles 10 and 24 of the Constitution were implemented correctly in Turkey, things would be fine for his community. (Bio note: Dogan is a Bogazici University-educated, Ataturk lapel-pin wearing Turk who speaks fluent English and enjoys success in the apricot business. His brother is involved at a high level in the Cem Vakfi in Istanbul. End note.) He focused on national-level issues such as the state's unwillingness to approve the opening of some Cem Evi, and the need to modify the existing mandatory religious instruction which centers on Sunni Islam. He referred to the recent petition (which was denied) to open a house of worship in Cankaya in Ankara, characterizing as Ottoman -- like going to the Sultan -- the way in which the petition went from Kaymakam to Governor to Ministry of Interior to the Diyanet, and back down again. He further stated that like-minded Alevi foundations were in the process of uniting, with 12 having just joined with the Cem Vakfi in Istanbul. Other than the fact that downtown Malatya apparently has no Cem Evi, he did not seem to have many complaints specific to Malatya. He told poloff that a tape of an Alevi celebration held in Istanbul's Abdi Ipekci center last September was broadcast by local television, and claimed he received many positive phone calls from curious citizens after the broadcast. "People are scared of what they don't know," he said, adding that as people become more familiar with Alevi practices there is invariably a warm response. In February, Dogan invited both the Governor and Mayor of Malatya to an important celebration in the community, and they attend for more than two hours.

16. (C) Comment: The AK Party Mayor of Malatya, in a meeting with Poloff during a meeting last fall, on more than one occasion hinted that Western ways were chipping away at southeast Turkey's identity and traditional values. That view, on display in Malatya well before the March 11 Diyanet-directed sermon implying that missionaries were in Turkey to "steal the beliefs of ...young people," combined with the significant Turkish military presence in Malatya likely to be suspicious of outsiders, may explain why Reid came across as a man walking on eggshells. He clearly is not seeking to get into a public battle of principle; indeed, his style and content of communication indicated self-censorship. What is not clear is why: is it fear of attracting more attention and thus harming his community's efforts to share its faith, fear of putting his Turkish co-religionists in jeopardy, or has he forgiven those who wrote the articles and truly feels it is not significant? The answer is not as important as the fact that in yet another town in southeastern Turkey, the media, driven by a variety of political actors, has created a negative environment for Protestant missionaries. As mentioned earlier, some of Reid's comments indicated that one of his other colleagues in the community might be more outspoken about the situation there and post will continue to follow the situation. End comment.

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